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DE RUEHKO #1342/01 0730800
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 140800Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9708
INFO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/THE WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAWJA/USDOJ WASHDC PRIORITY
RULSDMK/USDOT WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCPDOG/USDOC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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RUYNAAAC/COMNAVFORJAPAN YOKOSUKA JA
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 9290

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 09 TOKYO 001342

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DEPT FOR E, P, EB, EAP/J, EAP/P, EAP/PD, PA
WHITE HOUSE/NSC/NEC; JUSTICE FOR STU CHEMTOB IN ANTI-TRUST
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OFFICE; SECDEF FOR JCS-J-5/JAPAN,
DASD/ISA/EAPR/JAPAN; DEPT PASS ELECTRONICALLY TO USDA
FAS/ITP FOR SCHROETER; PACOM HONOLULU FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY
ADVISOR; CINCPAC FLT/PA/ COMNAVFORJAPAN/PA.

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [JA](#)
SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 03/14/06

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- (1) Iwakuni residents say 'no' to relocation plan; Government fears domino effect

ASAHI (Page 2) (Abridged slightly)
March 13, 2006

Does the Japanese public accept a Tokyo-Washington agreement to

relocate US forces in Japan? Residents of Iwakuni in Yamaguchi Prefecture said 'no' to this question yesterday. Although the government outwardly denied any fallout from the Iwakuni referendum, the outcome is likely to spoil the government's coordination efforts for the relocation of the US Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in Okinawa. Some government officials fear that a domino effect might kick in to affect other local governments. Some local areas are taking seriously Iwakuni's rejection of the central government's policy.

Toranosuke Katayama, secretary general of the LDP caucus in the House of Councillors: "The state is responsible for national security and defense. The matter is not appropriate for a local plebiscite. It's a kind of regional egoism."

Former LDP Vice President Taku Yamasaki: "The results will be valid only for one week because Iwakuni will be merged with neighboring municipalities on March 20."

Other government and LDP executives also played down yesterday the outcome of the Iwakuni plebiscite. Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe also simply commented last night, "We will continue offering explanations sincerely to obtain the understanding and cooperation of local areas."

Contrary to such words, the government attentively watched the developments of the Iwakuni referendum. The Defense Agency implemented a system to immediately inform defense chief Nukaga and other executives once turnout topped the 50% line. Leaning of prospects that opponents would dominate the vote, a Foreign Ministry official discouragingly said, "The situation doesn't look good."

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The government's gaze is directed not only at Iwakuni but also at its coordination with local areas over Futenma, which is now at a critical stage. The relocation of the US Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station is the highlight in the realignment of US forces in Japan. But Okinawa Gov. Keiichi Inamine and Nago Mayor Yoshikazu Shimabukuro are opposed to a plan to relocate the Futenma airfield to Cape Henoko in Nago. The Japanese and US governments are also considering relocating a new U.S. Army headquarters, known as a Unit of Employment X (UEX), to Camp Zama, and an aerial tanker unit to Kanoya in Kagoshima Prefecture. Chiefs of local communities, including Zama and Kanoya, are also opposed to the planned US force realignment.

The government fears Iwakuni triggering a nationwide domino effect to conduct plebiscites, including Okinawa over the Futenma relocation plan. A senior Defense Agency official noted: "Although the majority of Iwakuni residents said 'no' to the government plan, we cannot change (the government plans). Any changes to the plans would push other municipalities toward referendums."

The government cannot afford to make compromise, and strong backlashes would follow its outright rejection of the wishes of local areas. The central government is in a dilemma.

Although the government has been adamant not to make any changes to the Futenma relocation plan, some have begun searching for ways to revise it.

For instance, the Nago municipal government presented the permissible scope of making changes to the plan. Defense Agency Director General Fukushima Nukaga held talks last week with Gov. Inamine and Mayor Shimabukuro in which the defense chief left some room for altering the plan, saying, "Ultimately I will make a decision." Prime Minister Koizumi has also instructed Taku Yamasaki to explore ways for making compromise, stating, "Local reactions are split, and coordination is necessary."

US force realignment will not realize without local consent. At present, prospects are gloomy even for holding a Japan-U.S. Security Consultative Committee meeting of foreign and defense

ministers (2 plus 2) in later this month.

Some have questions about Mayor Ihara's intent

Apparently relieved with the outcome of the plebiscite, Iwakuni Mayor Katsusuke Ihara said in a press conference last evening, "The opinion of Iwakuni residents is now clear, and I'm relieved."

Armed with yesterday's referendum that overwhelmingly rejected the government's plan to relocate US carrier-borne aircraft to the city, the mayor plans to urge the central government to rescind the plan.

Some have questions about to what extent Ihara intends to oppose the plan.

Ihara was reluctant to accept a plan to relocate a large transport helicopter unit from Hawaii to Iwakuni in late 2001, but he shifted his stance and accepted the plan in the following year. The city subsequently received subsidies for building the

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new city office building, which is now under construction.

In Iwakuni, the subsidies are regarded as the quid pro quo for the turnaround. "Mayor Ihara has obtained substance by keep opposing the relocation plan," a Defense Agency official familiar with the circumstances explained.

In offering an explanation to residents prior to the plebiscite, Ihara also stated: "We can gain more by speaking our minds. We won't get much if we willingly (accept) the plan."

The plebiscite that overwhelmingly rejected the government plan carries great weight. Depending on what the city can get in return for the outcome of the plebiscite, the municipal government may come under fierce criticism, ending up imposing a burden on the city.

According to the Asahi Shimbun's exit poll, 38% of the voters accounted for LDP supporters and of them 86% voted against the plan. Toshiyuki Kuwahara, president of the city assembly, did not go to the polls. He feared that if an overwhelming majority voted against the plan, that would be tantamount to waging a war on the central government and talks on economic stimulus measures would not move forward.

Visibly upset by the results, a Yamaguchi prefectural official, who had worked hard for accepting the plan, also commented: "If opposing the plan would serve in the interests of the prefecture, that should be the people's choice. It's important to make a clever decision. It would be too unfortunate if people opposed the plan and received nothing in return."

(2) Editorial: National security ignored in Iwakuni plebiscite

SANKEI (Page 2) (Full)
March 14, 2006

In the March 12 plebiscite, a vast majority of residents of Iwakuni, Yamaguchi Prefecture, rejected the government's plan to relocate US carrier-borne aircraft from the US Navy's Atsugi base to the air station in the city. The government still intends to maintain the relocation plan, as agreed upon with the US last October.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe stated yesterday, "Basically when an agreement is reached through Japan-US talks, that will be our final conclusion." The government's response is natural in view of the security environment surrounding Japan.

The relocation plan is specifically designed to transfer 57 US carrier-borne aircraft and 1,600 servicemen to the Iwakuni base once the construction of an offshore runway is completed in fiscal 2008.

Defense Agency Director General Fukushima Nukaga noted, "For the security of Japan, the Iwakuni plan must be realized at all costs." The relocation is a key factor in the planned US force realignment intended to improve deterrent capability and reduce burdens on municipalities hosting US bases. The transfer of carrier-borne aircraft is unmistakably intended to deal with China and North Korea.

The Japan-US Security Consultative Committee of foreign and

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defense ministers (2 plus 2) confirmed last year that the two countries would jointly deal with China's military buildup, North Korea, which test-fired two short-range missiles March 8, and other types of threats including international terrorism.

To begin with, it is not appropriate to take a local vote on a matter directly connected with the peace and security of Japan, which is the top priority for the central government. Local referendums must be limited to regional themes, such as mergers of municipalities.

Moreover, Iwakuni's local referendum ordinance will become void once it merges with seven neighboring municipalities March 20. Mayor Katsusuke Ihara, who proposed the plebiscite, will also step down from his post March 19. The new city's mayoral election will question again the propriety of the transfer plan in April. Ihara noted in a press conference March 12, "National defense policy rests with the central government, and (local areas) do not have the authority to dictate it." Ihara thus acknowledged that the relocation plan was not subject to the Iwakuni referendum in the first place. What was the plebiscite all about?

In 1997, Nago conducted a referendum on the relocation of Futenma Air Station, which threw the city into deeper turmoil. There is still no prospect for the relocation of the air station.

Mindful of the interests of the entire country, local governments must not forget that they are responsible only for regional matters.

(3) Editorial: Realignment of US bases in Japan requires firm persuasion

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)
March 14, 2006

In the March 12 plebiscite, Iwakuni residents said "no" to the plan to shift carrier-borne aircraft from the US Navy's Atsugi base to the air station in the city, which is specified in the bilateral plan to realign US bases in Japan. Although local residents have the right to express their wishes based on local ordinances, national security rests with the central government. When there are gaps in views between the central and local governments, there is no other way but to aim for an agreement through talks.

Talks were held last week between senior foreign and defense officials of Japan and the US. They have been working hard to produce a final report on US force realignment before the end of this month. The final report, which will essentially be a concrete implementation plan, is expected to clearly specify timeframes. But in many cases, Tokyo has yet to obtain the consent of affected local governments.

The government plans to give priority to the Japan-US agreement and convince local governments based on it. Some are criticizing such a step as jumping the gun, but the central government is allowed to act at its own discretion to some extent. It is international common sense that the Japan-US alliance is functioning to bring stability to the Asia-Pacific. The government's stance also comes from the fact that political parties supporting the Japan-US security system garnered large numbers of seats in past national elections.

The plan to transfer aircraft from the Atsugi base in the residential area to an offshore base in Iwakuni resembles the relocation of Futenma Air Station to Nago. In view of the risks of the two cases, it is undoubtedly desirable to relocate them to new sites. But when it comes to the base issue, people tend to agree in principle and oppose the specifics. A concept has surfaced to discuss a realignment promotion bill to get it approved in the Diet to convince local governments.

The bill could be a carrot or a stick to local governments. It will allow the central government to provide local governments supportive of US force realignment with subsidies to revitalize their economies beyond the conventional base measures. The legislation may also pave the way for shifting some powers from local governments to the central government to make it difficult for local governments to put up resistance or delay actions based on their legal powers.

The step, which seems difficult to build consensus even in the government and ruling bloc, is expected to draw strong reaction from local governments. The government and ruling bloc are expected to take the step as the last resort after their strenuous efforts failed to win local consent. They can take some other steps before resorting to it. Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito lawmakers are required to take action from a broad perspective instead of just serving the interests of their constituencies. Members of Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan), the largest opposition party attaching importance to the Japan-US alliance, should do the same.

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and post-Koizumi contenders must visit Okinawa and Iwakuni. After all, national security rests on the central government.

(4) Junior LDP members meet Abe, may support his candidacy in presidential race

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
March 14, 2006

Chief Cabinet Secretary Abe met with about 10 House of Representatives members of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) at a Japanese restaurant in Tokyo last night. The LDP members from various factions agreed to hold a meeting periodically. According to a participant, those serving two to five terms in the Lower House joined the meeting, including Yoshimi Watanabe (independent), Midori Matsushita (Mori faction), Taimei Yamaguchi (Tsushima faction), Yoichi Miyazawa (Niwa/Koga faction), Yoshitaka Masuhara (Ibuki faction); and Shinji Inoue (Kono faction).

These LDP members met at LDP headquarters just after Prime Minister Koizumi dissolved the Lower House on Aug. 8 of last year, under this slogan: "Let's form a young LDP centering on Mr. Abe." There is the possibility that the group would support Abe in the LDP presidential race slated for September. In the meeting, Abe did not refer to the presidential election. The participants reportedly exchanged views on the situation in electoral districts and other matters.

(5) SDF integration set for Mar. 27; Massaki named to top joint command

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YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)
March 12, 2006

The Defense Agency will integrate the three Self-Defense Force services' respective chains of command on March 27. The SDF Joint Staff Council (JSC), currently in place to top the Ground, Maritime, and Air Self-Defense Forces (GSDF, MSDF, and ASDF),

will be abolished and will be replaced with a reorganized body named the Joint Staff Office (JSO), which will serve as the SDF's integrated joint command. The GSDF, MSDF, and ASDF currently have their respective staff offices authorized to command their respective operations. The JSO will integrate their operations under its command for more efficient operations. Hajime Massaki, currently in the post of JSC chairman, will be the first JSO chief to represent the three SDF branches and serve as an aide-de-camp to the director general of the Defense Agency.

Under the SDF's current chains of command, the Defense Agency director general issues directives and orders to the GSDF, MSDF, and ASDF through their respective chiefs of staff, who are basically entitled to command their respective operations. The three SDF services use different languages and have different cultures, according to a GSDF brass officer. At the time of the 1995 Hanshin (Osaka-Kobe) earthquake, for instance, the SDF's airlift of foodstuffs was delayed in disparate heliborne operations.

The Defense Agency plans to place the JSO chief between its director general and the three SDF branches in order to beef up their joint operations under the SDF's integrated chain of command, thereby expediting decision-making and commanding for the SDF's rapid and effective readiness.

The JSO, under its chief and deputy chief, will have four elements for administration, operational planning, defense planning, and command and communications systems. In addition, the JSO will also have a spokesman. The JSC is currently staffed with about 400. The JSO's staffing, however, will be increased to about 500.

In its actual operational planning, the JSO will call up troops from the three SDF services to organize joint task forces to be readied for ballistic missile defense (BMD), major earthquake disasters, incursions on Japan's outlying islands, evacuation activities for Japanese nationals overseas, international emergency relief operations, and various other possible contingencies.

(6) Government to set up two new organizations with eye on applying pressure on Pyongyang; Strict application of law

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Slightly abridged)
March 14, 2006

The government's special assignment team to deal with the abduction issue (chaired by Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Seiji Suzuki) yesterday decided to establish two cross-sectional organizations designed for stricter application of existing laws and strengthened information collection capability. The aim is to strengthen pressure on North Korea. The government will aggregate information on wrongdoings by North Korea and strengthen a crackdown system. It will not invoke economic sanctions for the

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time being, but it will aim to extract concessions from Pyongyang by switching to a policy of applying pressure.

Crackdown on misdeeds, including illegal exports, to be toughened

The organizations to be established anew are the Law Enforcement Team and the Information Collection Council. The Law Enforcement Team will consist of department director generals and councilors of the Justice Ministry, the Finance Ministry (MOF), the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI), the Financial Services Agency, the National Police Agency, and the Japan Coast Guard. The team will collect information on illegal exports of products convertible for military use and the smuggling of narcotics and counterfeit money. At the same time, strict inspections will be carried out on North Korean vessels. Police and the Japan Coast Guard will establish a joint investigation system. The team will have its first meeting today.

The umbrella body of the Law Enforcement Team is an informal

taskforce set up by Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinto Abe last December. The teamwork has already produced results, as can be seen in the fact that the Yamaguchi Prefectural Police raided a Tokyo trading company on suspicion of violating the Foreign Exchange Law by illegally exporting freeze-dryers, which can be converted to make biological weapons.

The Information Collection Council will be comprised of the Public Security Investigation Agency director general, the vice foreign minister, the National Police Agency director general, and the Cabinet Intelligence director. The panel will analyze information on North Korea's illegal activities so that its efforts can lead to identifying abductors and confirming whether abductees are alive in North Korea.

The Law Enforcement Team will mainly be in charge of measures to apply pressure on North Korea, which involves cooperation among several agencies. Revising the reduced rate currently applied to the property tax imposed on facilities related to the General Federation of Korean Residents in Japan (Chongryun) and strengthening surveillance on money laundering have been suggested as measures to be taken by each government agency, based on laws under its jurisdiction.

Abe during yesterday's press conference underscored: "I will face North Korea with dialogue and pressure. The ultimate pressure will be applying economic sanctions. However, there are many ways of applying pressure before reaching that stage."

Some have suggested that North Korea may take some action in order to move forward its relations with Japan with an eye on September when Prime Minister Koizumi's tenure expires. There are signs that North Korea expects Japan to play the role of broker for improving relations between the US and North Korea.

Measures to apply pressure through strict application of current laws

Measures taken jointly by six government agencies

METI will make a list of companies that are suspected of illegally exporting products convertible for military use.

Police will provide information on counterfeiting and drug smuggling

Police and the Japan Coast Guard will jointly inspect North

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Korean vessels anchored at Japanese ports

The Justice Ministry and the Finance Ministry will assign personnel at immigration control and customs offices for strengthened surveillance of belongings (of North Korean travelers).

Police officers who can speak Korean fluently will be dispatched to immigration control offices and customs houses.

Measures to be taken individually by each government agency

Make boat state control on North Korean vessels stricter

Strengthen surveillance of money laundering

Appropriate taxation on facilities related to Chongryun

Strengthen inspections of mail in order to prevent illegal transfers of money

(7) Editorial: Will forest environment tax really contribute to conservation?

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 5) (Full)
March 13, 2006

Moves are afoot across the nation to introduce a forest environment tax as part of efforts to control floods and secure water resources by preserving forests. Its philosophy makes sense to some extent, but if no explanations are given to residents on the details of planned projects and procedures, it will be difficult to obtain their agreement.

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Local governments are allowed to introduce a forest tax or forest environment tax as a special tax. Kochi Prefectural Government was the first prefecture to adopt the tax in fiscal 2003. Since then, 13 prefectures have introduced or have decided to introduce the tax. Shiga Prefecture plans to adopt it in fiscal 2006, and Aichi Prefecture is studying the matter.

According to authorities, the purpose of the tax is to prevent disasters and secure water resources by preventing further devastation of privately own forests that have been left untended due to the stagnant forestry business. Tax revenues will be used to finance measures to thin out forests, grow broad-leaved trees, and to publicize the need to preserve forests. However, the government has yet to give accurate explanations about problems resulting from deforestation. Discussions on effective projects have not been fully conducted, either.

In the farmland reform that was promoted as part of postwar democratization, absentee landowners were done away with, and ownership of the land was given over to farmers. But no measures were carried out regarding forest possession. Domestic lumber was in high demand from the early postwar period through the early 1970s. During this period, forestry businesses earned huge profits.

Later, though, the forestry industry declined. Tax money is about to be poured into the industry to finance measures to take care of even privately owned forests. This is an utterly unreasonable approach. There are some individuals and organizations making efforts to grow and take care of forests despite poor sales. Unfair treatment must be avoided.

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Local governments that have decided to adopt plans to preserve neglected private forests with public funds should enforce regulations to strictly restrict afforestation, tree trimming, and land use by land owners and leaseholders, as well as to have them return accrued profits to the government's coffers.

In the technical field, detailed research and study will become necessary to work out effective ways of planting trees and cutting forests in order to preserve forested mountains.

Heavy rainfalls in September 2000 caused landslides in the region around the Yahagi River running from Nagano Prefecture through Aichi and Gifu Prefectures. As a result of the floods, about 35,000 square meters of driftwood covered the Yahagi dam reservoir.

The Honokuni Morizukuri no kai (Association for Promoting Mountain Afforestation), including Minoru Morita, conducted research to find out the age, species, and place of origin of the driftwood. The research results provide useful guidance. Specifically, the following contents were made clear: (1) If cut trees are left untouched on a mountain, they tumble down the mountainside when the area is flooded; (2) if Japanese cedars or Japanese cypress are planted on a mountainside, heavy rain will tear up the trees, so bushy trees are desirable; and (3) planting trees in areas of rocky soil susceptible to weathering will not be effective.

In order to protect forests, such measures as trimming trees and increasing broad-leaved trees are not sufficient. It is imperative to explore effective means to preserve forests while taking into consideration such elements as geological conditions, climate, landforms, and possible disasters first and then to implement projects. The blithe idea that introducing the new tax should come first is unacceptable.

SCHIEFFER